

CHINA EXPECTED TO RELEASE TWO U.S. AGENTS AS GESTURE

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Chicago Daily News Service

HONG KONG—Two American intelligence agents who

have served 19 years in a Chinese prison for espionage will be released by Christmas as a good-will gesture to set the stage for President Nixon's visit to Peking after the first of the year, according to well-informed sources.

The two are John Thomas Downey of New Britain, Conn., and Richard George Fecteau of Lynn, Mass., CIA agents who were captured when their unmarked plane was shot down over Manchuria on Nov. 19, 1952.

Downey's release could be imminent.

His mother, Mrs. Mary Downey, 74, and brother, William, 39, a New York lawyer, arrived in Hong Kong Sunday after visiting John the last two weeks in Peking.

Mrs. Downey said her son informed them that his case was being reviewed in accordance with the Chinese "policy of leniency."

Mrs. Downey said she also was allowed to visit Fecteau, who is being held in the same prison as her son, and that Fecteau also was in excellent health and fine spirits.

Downey was sentenced to life imprisonment. Fecteau has virtually completed his 20-year sentence.

Sources believed that Peking would free both men simultaneously for maximum propaganda effect.

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